

Remarks at an Independence Day Celebration

July 4, 2009

Welcome to the White House, and happy Fourth of July. Michelle and I are honored and proud to have you here on the Fourth. And we're humbled to be joined up here by heroes, men and women who went beyond the call of duty in battle, some selflessly risking their lives again and again so that others might live. True to form, they, like all of you, say they were just doing their job. That's what makes you the best of us, and that's why we simply want to say thank you to each and every one of you for your extraordinary service to our country.

We're joined in that sentiment by Vice President Joe Biden, who, as many of you know, is marking Independence Day with troops in Iraq, and Jill Biden, who's spending it with military families in Germany.

I should say that there's also one girl in particular who's just thrilled that all of you are here, and that is Malia Obama, because this happens to be her birthday as well. When she was younger, I used to say that all these fireworks were for her. *[Laughter]* I'm not sure she still buys that, but, even if this backyard is a little bit unique, our gathering tonight is not so different from gatherings that are taking place all across the country, in parks and fields and backyards all across America. In small towns and big cities, folks are firing up grills, laughing with family and friends, and laying out a blanket in preparation for the big show. They're reliving the simple, unmistakable joys of being an American.

But I suspect they're also taking some time to reflect on the unique nature of what it means to be an American; to give thanks for the extraordinary blessings that we enjoy; to celebrate and uphold the ideas and values that have invigorated and sustained this democracy and made it the lasting beacon for all of the world.

Just imagine the extraordinary audacity it took 233 years ago for a group of patriots to cast off the title of subject for citizen and put ideas on paper that were as simple as they were revolutionary: that we are equal; that we are free; that we can pursue our full measure of happiness and make of our lives what we will.

In retrospect, it seems inevitable. But I think it's fair to say that even the Framers of that declaration—especially the Framers of that declaration—would be astonished to see the results of their improbable experiment: a nation of commerce that led future revolutions in industry and information; a nation of discovery that blazed a trail west, cured disease, and put a man on the Moon; a nation of progress that strives perpetually to perfect itself; and a nation of hope that has again and again inspired people the world over to reach for the same freedoms we hold so dear.

And at each and every moment, generations of brave and selfless men and women like those standing alongside me have defended those freedoms and served our country with honor, waging war so that we might know peace, braving hardship so that we might know opportunity, and sometimes, paying the ultimate price so we might know freedom.

You are the latest, strongest link in that unbroken chain that stretches back to the Continental Army. You're the heirs of that legacy of proud men and women who strained to hold together a young union; who rolled back the creeping tide of tyranny; who stood post

through a long twilight struggle; who have taken on the terror and extremism that threatens the world's stability.

And because of your brave efforts, American troops this week transferred control of all Iraqi cities and towns in Iraq's Government to Iraqi security forces. Because of what you did—[*applause*—because the courage and capability and commitment of every single American who has served in Iraq, a sovereign and united Iraq is taking control of its own destiny.

Iraq's future now rests in the hands of its own people. As extraordinary an accomplishment as that is, we know that this transition won't be without problems. We know there will be difficult days ahead. And that's why we will remain a strong partner to the Iraqi people on behalf of their security and prosperity.

But I want to say this to all of you: You have done everything that has been asked of you. The United States of America is proud of you. I'm proud to be your Commander in Chief. And that's why, this Fourth of July, I renew my pledge to each and every one of you that for as long as I have that immeasurable honor, you will always have the equipment and support you need to get the job done. Your families will always be a priority of Michelle's and mine and remain on our hearts and on our minds. And when our service members do return home, it will be to an America that always welcomes them home with the care that they were promised.

It is, after all, your service, the service of generations of soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coast guardsmen, that makes our annual celebration of this day possible. It's your service that proves that our founding ideals remain just as powerful and alive in our third century as a nation as they did on that first Fourth of July. And it is your service that guarantees that the United States of America shall forever remain the last, best hope on Earth.

So, happy Fourth of July, everybody. Right now, the Marine Band is going to pay tribute to your service with a few songs that I think you know.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:06 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Biden.

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